

EPA Region 8 FY07 Regional Geographic Initiative Project Proposal Guidance

Name of funding program: Regional Geographic Initiative

General Description: Regional Geographic Initiative (RGI) grants fund unique, geographically based projects that enhance the Agency's ability to protect human health and the environment. In Region 8, RGI funding for 2007 will support implementation of demonstration projects in focused geographic areas within Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming to improve water quality in impaired or threatened water bodies to eventually meet water quality standards. The selection of focus areas was based on 8-digit HUCs or on other state watershed planning areas (such as TMDL Planning Areas) where watershed planning has been completed and on identified areas that offered opportunities to meet EPA's strategic targets.

Successful proposals will be those that best describe how the project will demonstrate the greatest improvements to water quality in impaired or threatened water bodies and best align with one of the Regional Priorities. Proposals must be for demonstration projects where planning has been completed and address at least one threatened or impaired water body. *Impaired and threatened water bodies* are defined as those waters that are identified as such in the state's most current Integrated Water Quality Report. The proposal should also identify the 12-digit HUC(s) where the proposed project will be implemented or where water quality is expected to be improved or restored.

Projects must contribute directly to the achievement of Goal 4, Sub objective 4.2.1 (Healthy Communities) and must demonstrate a clear link with one or more of the Regional priorities.

EPA recognizes that water-quality improvements are often not realized until several years after project implementation and projects often require several phases of restoration activities. Projects may contribute to meeting the strategic targets by demonstrating measurable water-quality improvements, rather than full restoration.

Due to the limited amount of funding available, it is expected that RGI-funded projects may only be one component of a broader watershed restoration project or a long-term initiative with multiple funding sources. RGI projects are generally one or two years in duration, with four years generally being the maximum. The Region expects to fund up to three to four projects for 2007, with proposal requests not to exceed \$150,000.

EPA's funding authority for this program comes under Section 104(b)(3) of the Clean Water Act, which states "...conduct and promote the coordination and acceleration of, research, investigations, experiments, training, demonstrations, surveys, and studies relating to the causes, effects, extent, prevention, reduction, and elimination of pollution..." RGI funds cannot be used by States or Tribes to carry out activities that would normally be funded under water quality (Section 106) or non-point source (Section 319) State and Tribal Assistant Grants.

Project examples consistent with Regional Priorities:

Energy – Protecting and/or restoring surface waters, drinking water sources, and ground water sources from polluted runoff and wastes that result from energy production activities.

Example: - Demonstrating innovative techniques that help prevent water quality degradation from coal-bed methane production facilities.

Agriculture – Protecting and/or restoring water quality in surface waters that are polluted with sediments, nutrients and pathogens that run off of fields and pastures and preventing degradation of healthy rivers and streams.

Example – Demonstrating the performance of a new pollution control practice to prevent (or reduce) nutrient pollution from entering threatened or impaired water bodies.

Revitalization - Projects that support the Region’s Revitalization Priority will be evaluated for how well they define and will deliver actions that promote cooperative protective, productive, and sustainable use, continued use, or reuse of property and natural resources. Proposals that will deliver sustainable new life to properties, natural resources and ecosystems, resulting in sustainable and secure enhancements to communities and ecosystems, will rank higher as meeting at least one of the three Regional Priorities in this RFP.

Example – (1) Demonstration of actual construction and/or clean up associated with revitalized land, water, and/or air uses, especially abandoned or orphaned mine sites related to ‘Good Samaritan’ clean ups.
(2) Demonstration of how restoration of contaminated land, water, and/or air resources leads to possible future land uses at idle properties.

Program Evaluation Criteria: RGI proposals will be evaluated on:

- 1) The extent to which the proposed project aligns with one or more of the Regional Priorities (agriculture, energy, revitalization, enhancing State capacity) – 15 points.
- 2) Whether the proposed restoration/protection activities demonstrate improvement and/or restoration of water quality in threatened or impaired water bodies (estimates of incremental water quality improvements should be included) – 25 points.
- 3) Whether the proposal includes a level of active state, local, and/or other stakeholder participation and support that occurred in the watershed planning phase and will occur in the implementation of the demonstration phase, including, but not limited to leveraged funding – 10 points.
- 4) Whether the proposal identifies project outputs and outcomes, and a plan for tracking and measuring progress towards achieving the expected project outputs and outcomes – 10 points.
- 5) Whether the proposal incorporates innovation into the restoration or protection activities, for example, the use of new techniques to incorporate into stream restoration projects or new technologies for pollution control practices – 10 points.

- 6) Whether the proposal describes how the proposed project is the outcome of a comprehensive assessment of water quality issues and impacts across the watershed, and is part of an existing watershed plan – 5 points.
- 7) Whether the proposal describes how the methods/tools approaches used for the project are transferable to other projects or locations and how the results will be disseminated within and beyond the project area – 5 points.

Selected proposals will form the basis for detailed work plans to be negotiated between the sponsors of selected projects and designated EPA Project Officers; this negotiation may include modifications to the proposed project scope based on overall funding levels available.

Examples of outcomes (but are not limited to):

- Implemented Best Management Practices (BMPs) and restoration projects that improve riparian and in-stream physical, chemical or biological health. Some examples include miles of stream channel restored, miles of riparian vegetative buffer installed, and pounds of pollutant loading reduced or eliminated as a result of improved practices or restoration activities.
- Improved water quality as measured by pre- and post-project monitoring of water chemistry, physical habitat or biological indicators. EPA recognizes that for most water quality restoration activities, measurable responses in water quality are likely to take longer than the project period.
- Improved capability by a state or tribe to conduct assessment activities that measure effectiveness and environmental results of actions conducted as part of the nonpoint source or other restoration programs, or assistance provided by the state to local partners in measuring environmental results.
- For Revitalization Projects, the most common and preferred outcome can be expressed as a media outcome (e.g. improved water, air and/or land quality) and also in acres available for clean up, protection, or restoration and acres actually made ready for use and/or reuse and/or cooperative conservation (including cooperative conservation and protection agreements).

Examples of outputs (but are not limited to):

- A final project report that documents and quantifies BMPs and restoration or protection activities implemented
- Enhanced multi-sector partnerships that are capable of leveraging resources from multiple sources to implement planned restoration actions
- Applicants seeking funds from the RGI programs to protect and restore water quality on a watershed basis must address the general and program specific criteria in Section V of this solicitation.
- Site visits or demonstrations that help disseminate information and project results.
- Pre- and post-project monitoring results.
- Modeled load-reduction estimates.